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ABSTRACT

The purpose of developmental evaluation is to guard against over-simplification. Three questions which the evaluator may ask to help accomplish this task are: 1) What are the conditions under which the project will have to exist? 2) What are the activities or transactions that will have to take place if the project is to be successful? 3) What outcomes, both intended and unintended, are the logical consequences of the project? (JK)

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EXTENDING THE COUNTENANCE: A COMMENT FOR EVALUATORS*

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To begin with an allusion, and a literary one at that, is probably wise when you're faced with a topic which is itself something of an allusion. Some would say illusion, I suppose, and be in some measure correct. The topic is clearly allusive in that I'm sure it conjures up in some minds images of an evaluative history characterized by evaluators who promised more than they could deliver and by designs that proved to be inadequate for the questions they were suppose to answer or the decisions they were intended to inform. Some people who have experienced the mandate and press for evaluation in the several titles of the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act, for example, in state-wide gifted programs, and broad social programs across the country may some day call this the age of the great evaluation hoax.

The picture of present practice in evaluation is not pretty. The evaluation specialist still struggles for a methodology; still debates the *raison d'être* of his own roles and goal. At the same time students, teachers, and administrators, across the land continue

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*The title alludes to Robert E. Stake's-"The Countenance of Educational Evaluation," Teachers College Record, 68:7:43-60. Apr. 1967.

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to request evaluation expertise. Whether this press for service should be construed as an affirmation of some rational model of man--some implicit belief that better information is related to better decisions--or as a response of a community become more sensitive about its limited resources and the significance of worth (both perhaps or neither) is a question deserving of attention. To put the question more simply is to ask the first of a series of key questions. That question is:

Why do we or should we evaluate?

The answer to that one is bound up in a second one:

What is an evaluation supposed to do?

When we have a momentary answer to both of these questions, we will have constructed a rationale for evaluation, and that is the first and most important problem that has to be solved.

Who do we or should we evaluate?

What is an evaluation supposed to do?

In what follows, I will offer one answer to the question, *"What is an evaluation supposed to do?"* In so doing, I will try to present one important idea, and three additional questions that may help us move from theory into practice, a bloody hard thing to accomplish.

Let me begin now the pursuit of an idea. Let me see if I can find a language and a metaphor that will mean it to you. I shall begin with simplification.

More than 100 years ago, the Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt saw that ours would be the age of the great simplification and that this simplification would come to be the damning peril of the times.

These have become meaningful words for me as I have tried to practice evaluation within a development process.

My friend, Bob Diamond, who labors with me at the Center for Instructional Development at Syracuse University, has often reminded me that part of my role as an evaluator is to keep the Center honest. I am still not quite sure what that means. I'm somewhat more sure that it's a hard thing to do. More seriously, if I accept Burckhardt's observation that over-simplification is a damning peril, I then want to say that part of dishonesty lies in the denial of complexity. Now, I'm getting closer to the idea.

To deny complexity is to be dishonest. What the evaluator has to learn how to do is to guard against over-simplification, and to do this means to be able to describe complexity. To borrow a phrase from the researcher, within the development process the evaluator must work to avoid the type one error or the too quick rejection of the null hypothesis that says: no difference.

Let me try to illustrate what I mean when I say that developmental evaluation works to guard against over-simplification. The process of curriculum or course development can be described as an arduous, logical attempt to define some conditions, specify a range of treatments or activities, and posit a set of outcomes or things that may happen as a result of the activities. Drawing from previous research, experience, and at times, good strong hunches, the curriculum developer will attempt to state--as specifically as he dare--the logical relationships that describe the module, course, or program he intends. Those who bear the scars of this process can testify to its difficulty, profit, and comedy.

Given this logical array, or seeking to find it out, what the evaluator must do is develop a series of data sets that will allow judgments to be made as to whether or not the intentions of development have been fulfilled in practice. It is in this way that the evaluator will guard against over-simplification. He will guard against the notion that wishing makes it so.

Examples of this type of developmental evaluation have characterized current efforts at the Center for Instructional Development. Some few may help me clarify the idea of evaluation as a guard against simplification.

In one project, it was intended that students would enter the course already possessing certain pre-requisite knowledges and skills that would be necessary for additional instruction to be effective. Confidence on the part of the content expert was high. He was quite certain that his students would possess these knowledges and skills. He had stated a logical condition. As part of the developmental evaluation, measures were collected to determine if that was the state of affairs. Contrary to expectation, the data suggested that as many as 80% of the entering students did not possess these skills and knowledges. Consequently, a package of remedial materials was developed. We had guarded against the early acceptance of an assumption by submitting it to empirical examination.

In another project, a small lecture-discussion session was supposed to be characterized by high levels of verbal interaction and an emphasis on the cognitive processes of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, an intended activity. Data collected said that approximately 75% of the class time had been devoted to straight

lecture presentation and that students judged the emphasis in that series of lectures to be on factual recall and the didactic presentation of definitions and rules. Again, we had been able to guard against the naive acceptance of activity or treatment by identifying, to some extent, where the logical intention had not been fulfilled in practice.

One last example. In another course the intention was that after treatment students would exhibit positive attitudes toward both the treatment and the course as a whole. Evidence gathered here through questionnaires, rating scales, and interviews suggested that not only did students not like the treatment but more disarming, their attitudes toward the course and the content area itself were considerably more negative at the finish than they were at the outset. Very upsetting news indeed.

I think these are three examples of how evaluation was used during development to guard against over-simplification and what you might like to think of as the self-fulfilling prophecy of curriculum development.

Lastly, there are three questions that I hope will provide some great big hooks (some might rather say hang-ups) that will help put your evaluation concerns in perspective. In the realm of rationale, I have already asked:

Why do we or should we evaluate?

and

What is an evaluation supposed to do?

In the realm of practice, I would like to add these three key questions:

> *What are the conditions under which the project will have to exist?*
>
> *What are the activities or transactions that will have to take place if the project is to be successful?*
>
> *What outcomes, both intended and unintended, are the logical consequences of the project?*

In one sense, the roles of the developer and the evaluator can come as close together as a tense change from do to did. They certainly are as close as the difference between asking, *"What shall we <u>do</u>?"* and *"What shall I say we <u>did</u>?"* These are surely some of the key questions of development as much, if not more so, than they are the questions of the evaluator. It may be that one of the unintended outcomes of this consideration is that we have inched a little closer to a realization that the logical relationships that unite development and evaluation are so strong as to deny any willful separation of the two, very much as my two eyes make one in sight.

Possibly, some developers have lived too long in the kingdom of the blind where they have been one-eyed, half-sighted, but nevertheless, kings. Possibly, what I have been talking about is what two eyes can do toward bringing us closer to true perspective, toward helping us deny simplification and visualize complexity.